



Education Watch

Enhancing Flexibility & Accountability ■ Leaving No Child Behind

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Less than Half of Harkin Funds Earmarked for Special Education

It's no secret that the federal government isn't making good on its promise to help states cover the costs of special education. That's why federal funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has increased by 173 percent since Republicans took control of the House in 1994. And it's why President Bush and the 107th Congress will provide another increase of more than \$1 billion for IDEA in the upcoming year.

Some lobbying and special interests groups support a proposal by Sen. Tom Harkin (D-IA) to turn special education into a new federal entitlement program by requiring mandatory full funding of IDEA. But the Harkin amendment isn't all it's cracked up to be. A number of crippling flaws have prompted strong opposition to it from Republicans and Democrats alike.

Less than half of the new funding mandated by the Harkin amendment would actually be required to go to special education.

The Harkin amendment would allow local school districts to use up to 55 percent of the increase in IDEA funds they receive for purposes other than special education. So only 45 percent of the additional IDEA funds would have to be used to improve education for children with disabilities.

Enactment of the Harkin amendment would cripple efforts to pay down the national debt. According to a Senate Budget Committee analysis, enactment of the Harkin amendment would lock in an estimated \$158 billion in additional federal spending over the next decade. That's \$158 billion that wouldn't be available for payments on the national debt, increases in other education priorities that may escalate in importance in future years, or other essential purposes.

Message of the Day

Making special education a new entitlement program would hinder future efforts aimed at reforming the special education system.

- ❑ *Switching a program from discretionary spending to mandatory spending, which the Senate proposes to do with IDEA, imposes a major change that should not be implemented without fully considering its impact on all IDEA programs.*
- ❑ *President Bush has proposed a billion-dollar increase in IDEA funding, but IDEA must be reformed so that this money is spent effectively for those disabled children who need it most.*

DAILY EDUCATION FACTS

- Last July, 99 Democrats joined 197 Republicans in voting to table a motion offered by Rep. John Baldacci (D-ME) to instruct House education conferees to adopt language passed by the Senate in S. 1 requiring mandatory full funding of IDEA. (*Roll Call Vote No. 238, 18 July 2001*)
- Since the GOP took control of the House seven years ago, Republicans have more than doubled IDEA funding, increasing it by 173 percent -- an increase far larger than any made under Democrat control.
- Making IDEA a mandatory spending program will make it very difficult to reform its current structure.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"This is sold as being a big increase in handicapped education when, in fact, virtually half the money can be spent for other purposes." -- Rep. David Obey (D-WI), the senior Democrat on the House Appropriations Committee, on the Harkin mandatory IDEA spending amendment, as reported in the August 4th edition of National Journal.